

EDWIN PHELPS

Letter

August 11, 1850

Pontiac Jacksonian [Pontiac, Michigan]

October 16, 1850

v. 13, #13, p. 1

Transcribed

June 2001

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From California.

Hanysville, California, Aug. 11, 1850.

Dear Father,—

It is with no small degree of satisfaction that I am permitted under such favorable circumstances to address you. We have arrived safely in California. We have had to undergo hardships of which the wildest stories gave but a faint description. We ourselves have not experienced suffering except from fatigue, but have seen more than I ever had seen, expected, or wished to see. We could hardly sit down to a meal of victuals without having some poor fellow begging us to sell him a little bread, which we could not do, as we had to buy at almost the first trading post, where provisions readily commanded two dollars per pound. But that was not the worst of the matter. Many had not the wherewith[al] to buy at such exorbitant prices. Contractors have not been able to fulfil their contracts to bring others through, on account of a falling short of provisions, or their teams failing, and in such cases the only alternative is for a man to take his traps on his back and run it through. For the last five hundred miles, thousands have taken that course. We used every expedient to save our horses, working night and day in order to make headway. To get feed for our horses, we had to swim the Humbolt[sic] or Dead Horse river sometimes twenty times per day. Many were in this way drowned. One was a man by the name of George Bailey, from Port Huron, Michigan, who travelled[sic] with us to the junction of the Salt Lake and California roads.

Out of twelve wagons that crossed the Upper Platte ferry together, not one was brought through. We left one of ours near the head of the Humbolt, where we had the misfortune to have our horses alkali'd. All, however, weathered it except one of our best ones. We had to leave the other wagon after crossing the

desert, and then went to packing. Thousands of horses and cattle are left on the Humbolt and desert, and it is not very pleasant travelling[sic] there. The worst tales you have read or heard, are, I venture to say, no exaggeration. We had the good fortune to get through with five out of six of our horses.

In crossing the desert we were passing dead and dying stock continually, there being no feed or water for forty five miles. That of itself was nothing, but after our teams had suffered from hard driving, bad grass and water, and often not enough of that, they were in no plight to bear harder fare. We came then to the Sierra Nevada mountains for the finishing touch, and you have th picture complete.

I think if some of the boys in our parts that wanted to come to California, had seen me climbing those hills, they would have said, "There goes one foolish fellow, and I will profit by his folly."

But let us look at the other side of the picture. Many think it a blank, and turn back while they have the means, cursing the country, and everything that appertains to it. I am inclined to think more favorably of it than that, although it does not meet my expectations by considerable. The best mines have been worked out, although there are cases where men make their fortunes in a short time, but it is a perfect lottery. We may make our fortunes in a few months, and we may dig hard for years and not make more than a living. Our prospects are not very promising yet. We have dug nearly \$60 4 of us the past week. We arrived a week ago yesterday, after being out nearly five months, but time has passed rapidly. We have had no trouble in our company, except that Ayres thought it was rather too hard a way to get along, and chose to leave us before we crossed the Rocky Mountains, and arrived here two weeks ahead of us. The rest of us stay together, and will probably go home together. We are all

well, and have been so all the way, except John Seeley. He had a slight attack of the mountain fever, but nothing serious. There has been the least sickness and death that I have seen in many a year. Here it is healthy, as a general thing, I believe. The climate is very pleasant, with warm days and cool night, the air being very clear.

The winters or rainy seasons are rather unpleasant I suppose, but there is one thing in our favor— we can dig, and they say that it is the best season. I think that by hard labor, prudence and health, I may be able to procure enough to come home with in a couple of years. After what I have said, I think that if the boys of our parts do not stay at home they are to blame, for I am certain that I could have made more at home in two years. It costs about one dollar per day to live here; flour twenty cents, pork twenty five, sugar 50, tea one dollar, hard bread 22 cents per pound, and molasses seventy five cents per quart.

We are in rather a pleasant situation, about seven miles from the village, up among the hills. What we call the village is a lot of log shanties, where they gamble, sell goods and preach all at the same time, and almost in the same house. We shall get used to rocking the cradle before we get away from here. A cradle only costs twenty dollars, a spade six, a pick four, a pan three and a half, and other things in proportion; but that is nothing where the land bears gold in abundance.

I have enjoyed my trip very much, but think I have had nearly enough of overland travelling[sic] for one while. I have not heard from home since I left, and you may expect that I shall be anxious to get an answer to this. There is still some doubt in my mind whether you can read it, for I have to write on the bottom of a pan, sitting on the ground. The mails are uncertain. Write immediately on receiving this.

Yours,

EDWIN PHELPS.